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SUBJECT: TURKISH RESPONSE TO IRANIAN RELIGIOUS MINORITIES
DEMARCHE

REF: STATE 054484

Classified By: Political Counselor Janice G. Weiner, reasons 1.4 (b) and (d)

¶1. (C) MFA Iran desk officer Aziz Sevi told us April 27 that Turkey is unlikely to make any public statements regarding the treatment of religious groups in Iran. He said the Iranian regime views the Bahai and other religious groups as a threat, and international criticism of Iranian treatment of them would likely result in increased suffering and a hardening of Tehran's position.

¶2. (C) Sevi said Turkey generally seeks to align its foreign policy with EU positions. In this context, he noted that the EU has not adopted any recent positions on the conditions of religious minorities in Iran. We asked if it was likely that Turkey would follow the EU's lead if the EU did adopt a position on this issue. Sevi indicated Turkey may well, but would not automatically follow the EU's lead.

¶3. (C) Sevi emphasized that Turkey is unlikely to make public statements on this or other issues regarding Iran unless there is an overwhelming international consensus. Even if there were an international consensus on this issue, Turkey would evaluate the issue carefully before joining the consensus. In Sevi's personal view, the Turkish MFA is unlikely under any scenario to make a public statement condemning Iran's treatment of religious minorities.

¶4. (C) We asked if Ankara would pass a private message to Tehran expressing Turkey's concern about this issue. Sevi said the MFA would seek the input from the Turkish Embassy in Tehran. He suspected that Turkey would not raise this issue in private with Iranian authorities, but promised to keep us informed of any developments.

Comment: Turkey Has Its Own Problems

¶5. (C) The GOT is unlikely to criticize Iran for its treatment of religious minorities because Turkey has its own problems in this regard. As detailed in the International Religious Freedom Report, Turkish identity is based on the Turkish language and the Islamic faith, and the expression of any religious identity outside of the Sunni Muslim mainstream is generally considered a threat to national unity.

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